grade of natural rubber is Rs. 21.15 per kg. as against the Bench mark Price of Rs. 21.45 per kg. and the lower ceiling of the price band viz. Rs. 20.95 per kg.

(c) and (d). Indian has been a net importer of natural rubber so far. Only during the current financial year, it has not been found necessary to import rubber to meet the demand-supply gap. Price protection is ensured to the rubber growers through STC's procurement operations in the domestic market. However a decision on export, if any, would be taken at the appropriate time.

[*Translation*]

Export of Leather Goods

1429. SHRI SURYA NARAYAN YADAV: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the foreign exchange earned by export of leather goods during 1990-91;

(b) the countries to which leather goods are being exported; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken by the Government to export leather goods to more countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) The value of exports and hence foreign axchange earned of leather goods (including footwear, footwear components, garments but excluding semi and finished leather) was Rs. 1800.20 crores during 1990-91.

(b) Garmany, USSR, USA, UK, France, Denmark, Italy, Japan and Canada are main countries to which leather goods are being exported.

(c) Market promotion measures abroad and product development efforts to make Indian Leather goods competitive in world markets have helped in increasing exports and these measures are proposed to be continued and intensified, wherever required.

Repair of Ganganagar-Bikaner National Highway

+1430. SHRI MANPHOOL SINGH: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ganganagar-Bikaner National Highway is not in a road-worthy condition;

(b) if so, the steps taken by the Government for development and repair of this Highway;

(c) the emount sanctioned by the Government for the repair of this National Highway during each of the last three years;

(d) whether the funds sanctioned for this purpose have lapsed; and

(e) if so, the reasons therefor and the action taken by the Government against the delinquent officials?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER): (a) No, Sir. National Highway No. 15 from Ganganagar to Bikaner is being kept generally in traffic worthy condition.

(b) and (c). Development and maintenance of National Highways is a continuous process. During the last three years, 1.4.1988 to 31.3.1991, Rs. 175.35 lakhs were allotted for maintenance of this section, and as per information received from the State, actual expenditure was Rs. 175.22 lakhs. In addi-

tion, development works amounting to Rs. 908 lakhs are in various stages of progress in this stretch.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) Does not arise.

[*English*]

Expansion of Rubber Research Institute at Kottayam.

1431. SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have received any proposal for expansion of Rubber Research Institute at Kottayam;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the achievements of this Institute during the last five year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) No separate proposal for expansion of the Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII) at Kottayam has been received by the Government except the general proposals of Rubber Board for inclusion in the 8th Plan which includes expansion of the activities of the RRII also.

(b) The main proposals for expansion of the RRII during the 8th Plan include the following:-

i) Expansion of experimetal stations:

-Traditional area
-Non-traditional area

ii) Strengthening of existing facilities:

-North-East Research Complex
-Existing Regional Stations.

iii) Strengthening of Germplasm Centre.

iv) Strengthening of Biotechnology Research and Tissue Culture.

v) Strengthening of Technical and Supporting Services for Research.

vi) Strengthening of Agricultural Economics Division.

vii) Strengthening of Soils and Agricultural Chemistry.

viii) Establishment of a Division of on farm evaluation and demonstration.

ix) Establishment of a Division of Product Improvement.

(c) The achievements of the RRII during the last five years include the following:-

i) Evolved and Commercialised many high yielding clones of rubber.

ii) A Protocol for production of tissue culture plants developed and plants thus derived were field planted.

iii) Rationalised the policy for planting material recommendation.

iv) Recommendations formulated for control of all diseases and pests for rubber.